

POST-MORTEM WRITTEN REPORT

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MODULE TITLE: GAME DESIGN AND ASSET CREATION 1

GROUP NAME: OVERGROWN CITY

PROJECT TITLE: NEODRIVE

WORD COUNT: 2130 WORDS

INTRODUCTION

Our initial idea was that of a complex destruction derby hover racing game with shooting mechanics, health and shields. Although the idea that stuck was a hover racing game, we set out to have three playable levels for a demo, mainly white boxed but with a clear idea of the levels themselves.

The main role I played in development was level designer and animator, however, I took on roles of concept artist and modeller as the workload changed. My main role saw me creating a level design for the overgrown city that encompassed the concept art, group discussions, and general ideas surrounding the level.

RESEARCH EVALUATION

The way I approached the research for this project was mostly dynamic. My initial task was to create the level design and then further down the pipeline would be to animate the monster for another level. Although in a perfect pipeline, I would only be doing what was initially set out, nothing ever goes perfectly to plan and it is how you deal with that in the end. I took on extra roles such as concept artist, in our group me and another member shared the workload out for the role. I did the main level concept art whereas they did the important asset designs; because of this the type of research I had to conduct changed significantly depending on what part of the project I was focusing on at the time and became more of a reactive way to solve questions or problems that occurred.

GAME DESIGN THEORY

Looking back at the level design, I believe that the final design used would have greatly benefited from more research into actual design theory. As it was the first time, I took on the role of level designer I only did minimal research not understanding the significance of the research that was needed in this production.

TECHNICAL RESEARCH

When creating some of the models, I came across a problem documented in my production diary of how when trying to modify the model I wanted to fill a specific gap but could not find the right tool to do so. I tried looking on forums and the Maya website but could not find anything that could tell me what I needed to do. As the deadline was coming up for the model, I found a work around until I could access my tutor to ask directly to where they were able to give me a quick tutorial of how to achieve the desired outcome.

CONTEXTUAL RESEARCH

When creating the concept art, I found myself looking at some art pieces that were on the studio wall, one of which stood out to me was an environmental concept art from the game "The Last of Us". This inspired me to continue my research into this game as it had the aesthetic our group was looking for.

Other visual research I conducted for concept art was that of real-life photographs simply from google images to help with the perspective of the designs. I did this through the help of photoshop, learning how to layer images and mess with the opacity settings.

Although I did not research into the music side of things, it was decided early on in development that 80's style, Synthwave music, would be used and therefore was something we listened to during development in the studio.

GAME RESEARCH

One game we looked at for inspiration was a game that was in development but ended up being cancelled, was called "Power Drive 2000," an 80's themed arcade racer that included Synthwave music.

Another game referenced was that of "The Last of Us" as stated in Contextual Research.

RESEARCH CONCLUSION

For the most part, my research process was successful. However, I feel that if my roles and responsibilities were set out correctly at the start of the project it could have been more focused and relevant rather than dynamic and reactive.

I feel next time I would improve my research by setting out specific tasks to research such as level design theory. The difference that would make, would be that I could do a lot more relevant research rather than sorting through lots of irrelevant information.

Another thing I would do differently next time is that I would spend more time on research in general, I have learned that research is very important to any role not just when you are trying to solve a specific problem.

TECHNIQUE EVALUATION

As I had a new piece of hardware, I was able to experiment with the software Adobe Draw. I was familiar with photoshop and it worked in a very similar way, just more tailored towards drawing rather than photo editing. I was able to layer photos underneath my drawing surface and use them as reference points for perspective which I had used previously with photoshop, although it worked much better with this software and the tablet.

Another method used was sharing work through google docs in a shared drive. This had worked previously through another piece of software although google docs is more user-friendly. One way that the studio also communicated was through the use of Facebook Messenger, we had created a group chat to discuss the project in which I go into detail in the section Contributions within a Group.

DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION

The planned development would have seen me only develop any animations needed and one of the levels designs for the demo. Although with how the workload changed and some bottle necks happening, I took on other roles. However, I understood from the start that might be the case. Other roles I ended up taking on included some concept art and some modelling of assets.

As I and another member of the team shared the workload of the extra tasks, the work environment was enjoyable and productive. We communicated on most things and peer assessed other things. One example of this was when the team member created some track pieces, however, when looking at them I found that they did not follow the concept art. I expressed this and the design was changed, and I took over the redesign whereas they took one of my assets to model instead.

I feel that if we had a set concept artist on our team in the studio, that the design process would have been better as that would be their main task without other tasks needing priority. I also feel that even with this setback, communication was key and that is how our team managed to keep on top of the workload.

CREATIVITY

I feel that I had genuinely pushed myself in this module as I took on roles that I was not comfortable in. Specifically modelling and concept art are not my strong suits as I feel that I understand animation more. I feel I can make the animations more complicated and of better quality than my concept art, however with this project I tried out new techniques to improve my concept art and modelling of assets.

CONTRIBUTION WITHIN A GROUP

In the studio, once a week, we would discuss what each group had done, critique and explain problems that had arose in an informal manner. I found this worked well as if there was a huge problem everyone would be able to have some input to try and resolve it rather than just a few people in the specific group.

Another thing that worked was a group chat. We had a studio group chat and a level group chat so that we could ask questions, bring up ideas or problems or any other worries to whichever chat was relevant. I had used this process on a previous project and using it during this assignment proved to be advantageous to production.

The last idea that proved to be beneficial to the project was the use of the shared drive via Google Drive. Everyone could share and upload relevant files that others in the team needed or could use. I had used a shared one drive before and found it useful, but I found that Google drive was much more user-friendly in its set up. The studio used a simple type of naming convention inside the folder i.e. keeping the level names the same and the order of the name/number that appeared the same.

ITERATIVE DESIGN PRACTICE

Although it is documented in more detail in my Production Diary, the level design for the Overgrown City changes a few times. As it was my first time design a level, a racing track at that; the initial design changed quite a lot even though the core elements stayed the same.

In my initial design, you can see where the events of the track would take place as well as the height of the track and how that elevation changes. This carried over to the final design as it made for an interesting and fun track. Through player testing, it was found that my initial design was too short and not long enough to play for the demo. In the final design, you can see that this has changed quite dramatically with an entirely new sequence added to the original design of the track.

Other parts of the project that went through improvements and refinements was that of the models, as mentioned in Development Evaluation; I and another team member worked on the same model when the initial model did not fit with the concept art.

TIME MANAGEMENT

At the beginning of the project, I found that I fell into the “let’s make ideas and research” without thinking about moving on with some of the other tasks that should have been done quite early in the project. This led to an increase of tasks that needed to be completed around the same internal deadline so an increase in work ethic followed. I feel that if I had managed my time better at the start of the project and continued the type of work ethic that I had towards the end of the project that it would have been much better for development.

One thing that I have taken from this project is that although my time management is not the best, I have found that I am able to produce good quality work on a small timescale when pushed by deadlines. Although this is not a foolproof strategy and I should not rely on it, it does reflect industry standards with “crunch time”.

CONTEXTUALISING YOUR WORK WITHIN A WIDER THEORETICAL PRACTICE

As stated previously, I felt that I did not research level design theory enough when designing the Overgrown Level. Even so, I feel that with the minor knowledge I have on level design theory I created a rather good track for the demo. The level still needs some more player testing and tweaking but overall the design seems finished.

Next time I would put more time into researching other racing game tracks as well as real-life Formula 1 tracks for comparison and ideas. I would also research the work of Scott Rogers; the book is called “Level Up! The Guide to Great Video Game Design”. I have used it slightly in research but if I had spent more time researching through this book, I feel my level design would have been greatly improved.

CRITIQUE OF THE WORK YOU HAVE PRODUCED

I feel that I have done a relatively good job of identifying problems within my own work of the game. In my production diary, each problem is identified clearly, and the steps taken to either fix or improve the situation is set out, however, an example of this is seen in my model creation.

I identified a problem while creating a track piece, I was trying to use the wrong tool to fill a specific gap in a model which proved to be a problem. As there was an internal deadline for the model, I found a work around before I could ask a lecturer and finished the model, however, I made a point of finding out how to fix the model the correct way and documenting it for future use.

CRITIQUE OF YOUR OWN PRACTICE (AND ACTION TAKEN)

As mentioned previously in multiple sections, as a group we used new and tested ways of sharing documents and communicating online as well as in person. Although emails can work just fine, the use of Facebook Messenger to contact the entire team in real time was a great way for people to work at their own pace and time with feedback at the tips of everyone's fingers. I also found that the new platform for sharing documents was a lot easier to understand as well as use on the go via a smartphone or tablet.

I feel that I have mostly used tried and tested methods for this project, however it has made me improve the existing way that I work. Although some of the new skills such as new Maya tools and new software I can use have helped greatly and I will be able to use them in future projects.